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Orthodox and Communist: A History of a Christian Community in Mandate Palestine and Israel

MERAV MACK*

ABSTRACT *From the moment it was first introduced into the Arab community in the Holy Land, Communism had been associated with the Christian community, more specifically the Greek Orthodox (or Rum Orthodox) denomination. A large proportion of the Arab leadership of the Communist Party in Israel until the 1980s originated from this Orthodox background and the question discussed in this article is what links Communism, an ideology famous for its atheist tenet, with a particular Christian community? The discussion begins with the history of the Orthodox community during the Ottoman and British Mandate periods. It examines the historical, religious and political circumstances that first created the overlap between Orthodoxy and Communism. It then turns to examine the particular circumstances in the history of Israel that helped sustain and deepen this complex religious-political situation.*

Introduction

What links Communism and Orthodoxy? A large proportion of the Arab leadership of the Communist Party in Israel originated from a Christian background, particularly from the Greek Orthodox (or Rum Orthodox) denomination. They included the first leaders of Arab workers in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the majority of the founders of the National Liberation League between 1943 and 1948, and later the Arab heads of the Communist Party in Israel until the 1980s. When trying to explain what links Communism and this particular Christian community we need to examine the historical background of the Orthodox community, its particular religious conditions in this period as well as the geopolitical circumstance in Israel in its first 40 years that enabled and contributed to this correlation.

This article focuses on three major stages in the history of the Arab Orthodox community. It begins by tracing the history of the relationship between Russia, an

Transliteration of Arabic words follows JMES rules, except for personal names, which are written as given by the individuals in their published works and elsewhere. Variants are mentioned where required.

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Orthodox empire at the time of the Tsars, and the Arab Orthodox population in the Holy Land and follows the evolution of a social network that linked the two remote Orthodox communities. The second part examines the conflicted history between the Arab Orthodox laity and the Greek hierarchy of the Orthodox Church in the Holy Land. Anti-clerical sentiments were fuelled by growing national ambitions among Palestinians to free the local church from what the community perceived as imperialistic Greek control. The articulation of a vision for a Palestinian Orthodoxy was an important achievement, yet the failure to liberate the church was equally frustrating and increased the influence of secular, anti-imperialistic and ultimately Communist elements. The third part is dedicated to the early years of Arab Communism in Israel and the immediate political reasons that contributed to the enhanced overlap between Christian Orthodox and Communist identities in Israel.¹

The discussion of Orthodoxy and Communism brings together two historical fields that are not usually discussed together, namely the history of the Communist movement in Palestine and Israel and the history of Christianity in the region (especially of the Orthodox denomination). I draw on the work of historians of the Communist movement, Musa Budeiri and Ilana Kaufman, as well as Abigail Jacobson's research on the National Liberation League.² Zachary Lockman was not blind to the role of Christianity in the workers' movement but did not pay attention to the confessional tension it generated between the Christian Orthodox and Catholic communities.³ Noah Haiduc-Dale's illuminating book on the Christian community in British Mandate Palestine provides an insight into the diversification of the Arab Christian community in this period. The book concludes, however, before the important events of 1948 and thus misses the interesting historical turn in Arab leadership which empowered the Communists and deepened the divide within the Palestinian Christian community between Catholics and (Orthodox) Communists.⁴

Part I: Russia and the Rum Orthodox Population in the Holy Land

The late nineteenth century witnessed European powers preying on the declining Ottoman Empire, 'the sick man of Europe'. The aggressive race for control and territory was epitomised in the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854. Religion served as an important weapon in the battle to expand European spheres of influence in that they extended national protection to co-religious communities.⁵ This was a useful method of acquiring multiple nationalities.⁶ While much has

¹ I am indebted to Prof. Adel Manna', Prof. Amal Jamal, Samih Ghanadri and the late Nimer Murqus for sharing their understanding of this particularly convoluted history of the Palestinian Communists in Israel.

² Musa Budeiri, *Palestine Communist Party 1919–1948* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010); Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997); Abigail Jacobson, 'Between National Liberation and Anti-Colonial Struggle: The National Liberation League in Palestine', Working paper, Brandeis University, 2012.

³ Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴ Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁵ On the competition over the protection of Christians in the Holy Land, see Trevor Royle, 'A Churchwardens' Quarrel', chapter 1 in *Crimea: The Great Crimean War, 1854–1856* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

⁶ Discussions of the legality of such policies have reopened in recent years because similar methods have been re-employed by Russia. See the discussion of nineteenth-century policies and conventions in Kristopher Natoli,

been written about the political meaning of these colonial acts of expansion, not enough attention has been given to the social outcomes of this intervention and particularly the new identities that emerged from these transnational bonds. The recipients of European protection, indigenous Christian citizens of the Ottoman Empire (as well as Jews and other religious minorities), enjoyed numerous advantages that transformed their culture and daily lives.⁷ They adapted more quickly to European modernity: a European style of dressing, foreign languages and a European curriculum. The expanding gap between the educated and the uneducated reflected other divisions in society, such as between the wealthy and the poor, and between urban centres and remote rural areas. Religion was a factor in these divisions, though not necessarily the most important one, primarily because it facilitated access to education to those who enjoyed confessional protection. The gap in culture and education within society contributed to what Albert Hourani termed 'a dual society' within the Ottoman Empire, a modern community modelled on Europe existing alongside a traditional one.⁸

Imperial Russia made a fairly late entrance into the European competition for a foothold in the Ottoman Empire and it confronted three major obstacles.⁹ Firstly, Ottoman recognition and approval was difficult to obtain. Secondly, the competition with Western rivals, primarily France and Britain, was fierce. Thirdly, Russia's ambitions were not entirely welcome within the Orthodox world; Greece, more specifically the Greek Orthodox Church, was the historical Orthodox institution that guarded—some think owned—the sacred sites. It was supposedly also in charge of Orthodox institutions, property and people. Representatives of the Pravoslav Russian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land were also subordinated to the Greek Orthodox patriarchates. However, the Greek Orthodox Church was a poor institution and dependent on Orthodox states and increasingly on Russia. The Tsars sponsored the renovation of dozens of churches in the second part of the nineteenth century and were the primary donors to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate. They viewed themselves as patrons of Orthodoxy and sought greater intervention in the Orthodox communities in Europe as well as in the Middle East.¹⁰ Russia's support of the autocephalous state of the national churches in the Balkans (Bulgaria in 1870 and Serbia in 1879) was a prelude to the conflict over the Arabisation of the churches in the Holy Land. The successful election of the first Arab Orthodox patriarch of Antioch in 1899 was largely attributed to Russian support.¹¹

Footnote 6 continued

'Weaponizing Nationality: An Analysis of Russia's Passport Policy in Georgia', *Boston University International Law Journal*, 28(2) (2001), pp. 396–400.

⁷ Emine Evered, *Empire and Education under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 111–112.

⁸ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), pp. 295–298. On the significance of education in all segments of society, see Ela Greenberg, 'Educating Muslim Girls in Mandatory Jerusalem', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004), pp. 1–19.

⁹ Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843–1914: Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 15–17.

¹⁰ According to Tibawi, Russian legal claims were based on the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainarja of 1774, allowing a new Russian Orthodox Church in Constantinople. 'On the basis of this limited stipulation Russian diplomacy tried later to claim a virtual protectorate over the entire Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire.' A.L. Tibawi, 'Russian Cultural Penetration of Syria—Palestine in the Nineteenth Century', reprint from *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 52(2–3) (1966), pp. 1–2; see also Royle, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War*, pp. 19–28.

¹¹ Hopwood, *The Russian Presence*, pp. 159–175.

Education was another realm of competition used by the various European states 'to conquer the empire from within'.¹² Indeed, the Russians were not the first to have introduced schools for local Christians in the Ottoman Empire. They followed the successful precedent of others such as the Catholic missionary schools that had been operating in the region for many years, as well as the example of Protestant missionaries, whose educational activities began in the first half of the nineteenth century. Higher education became available too: the American University of Beirut (AUB) was opened in 1866 and the Jesuits enrolled students at Saint-Joseph University in Beirut from 1875.¹³ Russian leverage was embedded in language: Russian pedagogues invested in local teaching capacity and were the first to provide education in Arabic. The growing popularity of Russian literature resulted from major translation initiatives.¹⁴

Arab nationalism and cultural revival (al-nahḍa)

The movement towards Arab cultural revival, known as *al-nahḍa*, as well as Arab nationalism, both of which were introduced into the region in this period, owe much to the Arab Christian community. The *nahḍa* was a renaissance of Arabic literature and scholarship, which marked a new beginning for Arabic prose and poetry. Grammar books were composed and masterpieces translated into Arabic from various languages (including a new Arabic translation of the Bible), and printed in local publishing houses. The *nahḍa* was also the beginning of a great intellectual, social and political revolution in the Arab world that led to a collective struggle for independence from the Ottomans. The Christians' role as pioneers of this movement has been overstated in the past due to George Antonius's influential book *The Arab Awakening* (1938). Scholars have since demonstrated that many Muslim intellectuals and political leaders also shared these unifying ideas of secular Arab nationalism and anti-Ottoman ideology.¹⁵

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Christian education was a particularly important element in this cultural revolution. The comparatively small number of Russian Orthodox schools belied their impact.¹⁶ The first school was opened in 1882 by the Russian Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, known simply as 'the Society'. Two years later, the Society opened another three schools,¹⁷ and by the

¹² Evered, *Empire and Education*, p. 113.

¹³ Rafael Herzstein, *Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth* (Brussels: Le Cri, 2008); Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Ḥannā Abū Ḥannā, *Ṭalā'ī' Al-Nahḍah Fī Filasṭīn: Khirrijū Al-Madāris Al-Rūsīyah, 1862–1914* [Pioneers of the Renaissance in Palestine: Graduates of Russian Schools, 1862–1914] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2005).

¹⁵ Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 39. The celebrated historian George Antonius, author of *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: H. Hamilton, 1938) over-emphasised Christian intellectuals' role in the leadership of the *nahḍa* movement, but scholars have since criticised and revised his conclusions. Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) incorporates much of the recent literature on the revised history of the *nahḍah*.

¹⁶ There were approximately 500 French Catholic schools by that time with nearly 60,000 students, the largest number among the schools. There were also 675 American schools and 178 British schools. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁷ Hanna Kildani, *Modern Christianity in the Holy Land* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010), p. 141.

end of the century it operated 68 schools in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon with a total number of 9998 students.¹⁸ Before World War I forced the closure of all the Christian Orthodox schools, there had been 114 schools with approximately 15,000 students.¹⁹

Even before the establishment of these schools, however, the Society granted Arab Orthodox students scholarships to study in Russia. Despite Russian criticism that Arab students preferred to stay in Russia rather than return to the Holy Land, enough teachers eventually returned to make a decisive difference. The Russian schools were the only ones able to provide enthusiastic, high-quality teaching in Arabic. They thus attracted pupils from all other schools. A good example is the story of a Damascene by the name of Iskandar (Alexander) Kazma (or Kezma) who studied theology and education in Russia and was appointed chief inspector of all Russian schools in the Galilee.²⁰ His recently discovered diaries tell the story of this successful educational network.²¹

The impact of the Russian schools was especially evident in Syria and the Galilee, far from the Greek patriarchate that viewed it as a threat to its authority.²² Graduates of the Russian seminary in Nazareth became influential cultural figures. Among them were Khalil Baydas (1875–1949) and Salim Quba'yn (1870–1951), who translated fine Russian literature (Tolstoy, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Gogol) into Arabic. They were the editors of two literary magazines in Arabic: *al-nafa'is al-'asriyyah* [Contemporary Treasures] (1908–1923) and *al-Ikha'* [Fraternity] (1924–1933).²³ A female graduate of the Russian seminary in Beit Jala, Klavdia (Kulthum) Ode-Vasil'eva (1892–1965), also contributed to the translation of Russian classics into Arabic. One particularly powerful example of the Russian impact on Arab students in Palestine can be found in the memoirs of the Lebanese-American intellectual and poet Mikhail Naimy.²⁴ Educated in the Orthodox school in Nazareth between 1902 and 1906, Naimy admired Russian literature and noted that as a teenager his greatest dream was to travel to Russia: 'a great hope that was living in the very depth of my heart ... to gain more education in a country that gave birth to Tolstoy'.²⁵ Naimy wrote admiringly of his teacher, Antun Ballan, who had made a great impression on his pupils. Ballan was born in Homs, studied in Russia and returned to teach Russian language and literature in Nazareth. He is remembered, however, not just for his passion for Russian literature but for instilling national consciousness in his students. As Naimy wrote, he was:

¹⁸ Kildani, *Modern Christianity in the Holy Land*, p. 148, based on T.G. Stravou, *Russian Interests in Palestine 1882–1914* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1963), pp. 163–164. In the same period the Ottomans opened 51 secondary schools in the empire. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ḥannā, *Ṭalā'i' Al-Nahḍah Fī Filasṭīn*, p. 28.

²⁰ Hopwood, *The Russian Presence*, pp. 142–146.

²¹ Ḥannā Abū Ḥannā, 'The Diaries of Alexander Gabriel Kazma', in Zakaria Mhamad, *Wraq 'a'ilia: Dirasat fi altarikh al-ejtima'i al-mu'aser liFalastin* [Family Papers: Studies in the Social History of Palestine] (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2009), pp. 103–112; Tibawi, 'Russian Cultural Penetration of Syria'.

²² Abū Ḥannā, 'The Diaries of Alexander Gabriel Kazma', pp. 108–109; Hopwood, *The Russian Presence*, p. 141.

²³ Alyn Hine, 'The Influence of Russian Literature in Two Twentieth Century Arabic Periodicals', *Eras*, 12(1) (2010), pp. 1–24; Aida Imangulieva, *Gibran, Rihani & Naimy: East–West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2009), pp. 34–36.

²⁴ Also spelled Naima, Noaima or Nu'ayma. I use Naimy here in the same manner used by the author in his English publications.

²⁵ Mikhail Naimy, *Sab'ūn* [Seventy] (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1968), Vol. I, p. 142.

[t]he first who awakened patriotic feeling (al-shu'ūr al-watany) in us ... [He] spoke to us about the misery which our country was suffering under the Turkish yoke, the despotism of Sultan Abdulhamid ('Abd al-Hamid II) ... if the Arabs want to live a life of independence and dignity they should regain their land and usurped freedom.²⁶

While the teachers introduced their students to the idea of nationalism and liberation from the Ottomans, Naimy's account also shows that as a young Arab Orthodox he had developed a sense of greater—transnational—Orthodox belonging that gave him some communal reassurance. He remembered seeing waves of Russian Orthodox pilgrims, and noted: 'we were proud that these people were of the same creed as ours from the very heart of Orthodoxy, and that there were millions of them in their country. *We are not a small people on this earth*'.²⁷

Naimy's teacher Antun Ballan was an Arab nationalist and anti-Ottomanist whose teaching was typical of the subversive nature of the Russian-Arab network seeking liberation from the Ottomans. It was not concealed from the schoolchildren and it did not disappear even when the Russian schools were closed as a result of World War I and the revolution in Russia. Unlike other European schools and missionary institutions, the teachers in Russian schools were not foreigners, but local Ottoman citizens.

When trying to determine how and when the ideas of Communism were introduced into the lives of the Christian Orthodox in the Holy Land, it is this milieu that needs to be examined. The Arab Orthodox teachers who studied in Russia before the revolutions of 1917 and travelled frequently between the two countries were the main carriers of the new revolutionary messages. Even when the Russian schools were closed, they were still able to remain in the Holy Land and were soon recruited by other schools and continued to spread subversive messages: Arab and Palestinian nationalism as well as Communism.

The periodical *al-nafa'is al-'asriyyah* published by Khalil Baydas between 1908 and 1923 served as a platform for translated Russian literature, but it also promoted ideas of social justice. In the years that followed the Russian Revolution, *al-nafa'is* became more political and published works by Maxim Gorky (1919) as well as a biography of Karl Marx (1922). Shortly after the closure of *al-nafa'is*, *al-Ikha'* was launched by Salim Quba'yn in Cairo. It operated from 1924 to 1933 and, pursuing a similar literary and political mission, it published Russian works translated into Arabic including subversive anti-imperialist and socialist articles.²⁸

The historical affinity between the local Arab Orthodox people and Russia, which was initiated by confessional affinity, thus penetrated deep into the hearts of the Arab community and created a secular cultural bond that tied them together. This bond was firm enough to outlast the collapse of the religious infrastructure on which it was first laid.

Part II: 'The Shrines are Palestinian'—The Failed Dream of a Palestinian Orthodox Church

Along with the Russian-Arab cultural network, another reason for Arab Orthodox attraction to Communism was growing anti-clerical resistance, and more specifically a shared resentment of Greek domination. The ethnic landscape of the

²⁶ Naimy, *Sab'ūn*, Vol. I, p. 142.

²⁷ Naimy, *Sab'ūn*, Vol. I, p. 150, emphasis added; Kildani, *Modern Christianity in the Holy Land*, p. 162.

²⁸ Hine, 'The Influence of Russian Literature', pp. 14–18.

Christian Orthodox community in the Holy Land at the turn of the twentieth century consisted of the Arab and Russian communities, discussed above, and the very important Greek community. The Greeks have been present in the Holy Land continuously since the beginning of Christianity. They have always been committed to the safeguarding of the holy sites as well as the Orthodox population, and have helped to maintain thriving monastic communities. For many centuries the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre and the holy synod from which the patriarch is elected excluded the Arab Orthodox community. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, this Greek Orthodox exclusivity caused the Arab Orthodox community to feel antagonistic towards them to the point that some Arab Orthodox felt compelled to join other churches while others were drawn closer to secular movements, including Marxism and Communism.²⁹

Describing the Arab Orthodox community at the turn of the twentieth century, Ellie Kedourie wrote:

A new generation grew up, bitter at the pitiful spectacle of their community, resentful of the corrupt hierarchy which ruled them, contemptuous of their spiritual directors and conceived that only radical parting with tradition would ameliorate their condition.³⁰

The young Arab Orthodox who were already part of the cultural reformation of the *nahḍa* were determined to lead a major change also in their own community. A key figure in this project was the Jerusalemite writer, journalist, poet and educator Khalil al-Sakakini (1878–1953). He was an extraordinary man: widely read, a reflective and critical thinker, someone who had travelled the world and eventually returned to live in Jerusalem full of ground-breaking ideas. Sakakini initiated a movement which he named *al-nahḍa al-Urthuduksiyya*, meaning ‘the Orthodox Revival’. It had two main objectives: to reform the Orthodox Church and to Arabise it.³¹ Indeed, the model for this action was primarily the Arabisation of the patriarchate in Antioch, but also in the Balkans.³² Sakakini established an Arab Orthodox Council in 1908 and was joined by his cousin Y‘aqub Farraj, who served as a chairperson of the council for many years.³³ Another close friend and a

²⁹ This struggle has attracted much scholarly interest. Recent publications include: Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 58–60 (on the impact of World War I); and Daphne Tsimhoni, ‘The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem during the Formative Years of the British Mandate in Palestine’, *Asian and African Studies*, 12(1) (1978), pp. 77–121. Regarding developments in the relationship between the Greeks and the Palestinians in recent history, see Sotiris Roussos, ‘Eastern Orthodox Perspectives on Church–State Relations and Religion and Politics in Modern Jerusalem’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 5(2) (2005), pp. 103–122; Sotiris Roussos, ‘The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem: Church–State Relations in the Holy Land between the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict’, in Anthony O’Mahony (ed.), *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2008), pp. 219–231; Itamar Katz and Ruth Kark, ‘The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Its Congregation: Dissent over Real Estate’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37(4) (2005), pp. 509–534. A different interpretation of the tension between the community and the church is suggested by Merav Mack, ‘Christian Palestinian Communities in Israel: Tension between Laity, Clergy and State’, in Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard M. Hammer (eds), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Confrontation and Co-Existence* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 297–298.

³⁰ Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1984), p. 330.

³¹ Sakakini made a note in his diary regarding the establishment of a committee for the purpose of negotiating with the patriarchate in 1908. He uses the term ‘the Orthodox Revival’ for the first time on the day after his wedding, on 14 January 1912. See Khalil Sakakini, *Kadha Ana Ya Dunya* [Such am I, O World] (1955), ed. Hala Sakakini (Beirut: al-ittihad al-‘amm lil-kuttab w-lsahafiyin al-filastiniyyin, al-amana al-‘amma, 1982), p. 55.

³² Hopwood, *The Russian Presence*, p. 159. Hopwood (in *The Russian Presence*, p. 103) described the tension between the Arabs and the Greeks as ‘Slavonic dissension’.

³³ Khalil Sakakini, *Kadha Ana Ya Dunya*, p. 37, of 12 September 1908.

senior member of the council was 'Isa Daoud al-'Isa, who founded the influential newspaper *Filastin* (1911) three years later.³⁴ As chief editor he had the platform to advocate Palestinian nationalism and lead the ongoing struggle against Zionism. No less important was *Filastin*'s 'role as a mouthpiece for the Arab Orthodox laity fighting rearguard action against the foreign domination of their church'.³⁵ The tension between the community and the patriarchate in Jerusalem attracted the attention of British authorities shortly after the end of World War I. The first official report submitted by Sir Anton Bertram and Harry Charles Luke in 1921 summarised the Arab Orthodox community's view of the Greek patriarchate and its synod:

The Monks of the Convent (i.e. the Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre at the Greek Orthodox patriarchate) are a community of *foreigners who have robbed* the people of their inheritance.³⁶

Bertram and Luke correctly traced the origins of the tension in the Greek War of Independence and its impact on national sentiments and antagonism between the groups:

Arabic-speaking Christians had become, to a certain extent, identified in sentiment with the Arabic-speaking population around them and describe themselves as Arabs, while on the other hand, the Greek Ecclesiastics and Monks had acquired a new national consciousness or, rather, had retained their old national consciousness under a new name. They conceived of themselves no longer as 'Romans' but as 'Hellenes'.³⁷

Both sides, Greeks and Arabs alike, had developed strong national consciousness in this period, which led to accusations from both sides and eventually to an open conflict.³⁸ The British Mandate administration tried to mediate between these two factions, but by doing so may have inadvertently contributed to the growing dissent. Their approach to resolving conflicts between mixed national and ethnic groups often followed the principle of defining limits through the separation of the communities from one another, an approach that scholars nowadays believe inflamed tensions rather than reduced them.³⁹ On the

³⁴ R. Michael Bracy, *Printing Class: 'Isa al-'Isa, Filastin, and the Textual Construction of National Identity, 1911–1931* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), pp. 19–40; see also Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 35–62; Mustafa Kabha, *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm: The Palestinian Press Shapes Public Opinion 1929–1939* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 2004).

³⁵ Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 87.

³⁶ Sir Anton Bertram and Harry Charles Luke, *Report of the Commission Appointed by the Government of Palestine to Inquire into the Affairs of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 22, emphasis added.

³⁷ Bertram and Luke, *Report of the Commission*, p. 13.

³⁸ These included Arab complaints that Greek clergymen expressed their feelings of racial and nationalist superiority over them. The patriarchate was also accused of serious financial and moral corruption and British investigators found ample evidence to support the accusations. Anton Bertram and J.W.A. Young, 'Confidential Supplement to the Report of the Commission on the Controversies in the Orthodox Patriarchate', 26 January 1925, Israel State Archives (hereafter ISA), Record Group (hereafter RG) 65/p/3049/3, doc. 2; see also Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue Their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 19; Tsिमhoni, 'The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem', pp. 92–95 and 114–120.

³⁹ Re-evaluation of the degree of intermingling between the communities during the Ottoman period relies largely on the innovative research of Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). See also Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*, pp. 29–31; Salim Tamari, 'Jerusalem's Ottoman Modernity: The Times and Lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh', *Jerusalem Quarterly* (Summer 2009), pp. 5–27.

one hand the British administration supported the Arab community's demands for greater participation in church affairs and transparency in the legal and financial accounts of the patriarchate; on the other hand they did not yield to Arabisation pressure from the community.

For Khalil al-Sakakini the war against the Greeks became a personal and bitter battle and ultimately a symbol of radical failure. In his diaries he noted the moment that he declared a 'War against the Church'.⁴⁰ He paid a high personal price when the patriarch excommunicated him and the community failed to join him in his struggle as he expected. On the eve of World War I he resigned from the Arab Orthodox Council, renouncing his affiliation to the Orthodox community altogether. He wrote in his diary: 'I cannot be a member of this degenerate community ... I am no longer Orthodox! I am no longer Orthodox!'⁴¹

The atmosphere of resentment of the church hierarchy also resonated in Baydas's selection of translated material for the journal *al-nafa'is al-'asriyyah*, especially in Tolstoy's stories about the unnecessary riches of the church.⁴² Although Mikhail Naimy was a very religious man, his writings from the same period speak against the church establishment as well.⁴³

The Orthodox struggle against the established church continued without Sakakini. At the end of World War I the patriarchate reached its weakest point. It was approaching bankruptcy and, lacking the Tsar's financial support, it was reduced to selling lands to the Jews and to the British government. In Arab Orthodox eyes, selling land in Palestine, especially to the Jews, was a betrayal of their national cause; it was particularly painful when it was done by the heads of their own church and co-religionists. When the first Arab Orthodox Congress was convened in 1923 the sale of Orthodox property was one of the main issues discussed.⁴⁴ Bertram's second report of 1925 employs a more patriotic tone and harsher language against the church.⁴⁵ The council applied to the British Mandate Government and its Supreme Court seeking help and justice. In 1931, a memorandum was submitted to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem by a council that identified itself as 'the National Orthodox Body'. The short memorandum boldly defined its viewpoint:

The Patriarchate is an Orthodox Institution *in Palestine*.

The Patriarch and the Fraternity *are Palestinians*.

The Community is Palestinian and *the Shrines are Palestinian*.

(14 September, 1931).⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Sakakini, *Kadha Ana Ya Dunya*, p. 40, of 13 October 1908.

⁴¹ Sakakini, *Kadha Ana Ya Dunya*, p. 57, of 12 January 1914.

⁴² Hine, 'The Influence of Russian Literature', p. 12.

⁴³ Hine illustrates his approach in the following works: *al-Marāḥil* [The Stages] (1933); *Zād al- mī'ād* [Provisions for the Appointed Hour] (1936); *al-Bayādir* [The Threshing Floors] (1945); *Ṣawt al-'ālam* [The Voice of the World] (1948); *an-Nūr wa-ddaijūr* [Light and Darkness] (1950); and *Fī mahabb ar-rīḥ* [Exposed to the Wind] (1953). See Alyn Desmond Hine, 'Russian Literature in the Works of Mikhail Naimy' (PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2011), p. 53.

⁴⁴ The literature concerning the property of the Orthodox Church and the tension between the community and the church due to land sale is extensive. Recent publications include Katz and Kark, 'The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem', pp. 524–529; see also Roussos, 'Eastern Orthodox Perspectives', p. 111; Tsimhoni, 'The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem', pp. 84–101.

⁴⁵ Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*, p. 30.

⁴⁶ Classified under 'deserted documents of the Government of Palestine', see 'Memorandum Submitted to the High Commissioner by the National Orthodox Body in Jerusalem', 14 September 1931, ISA, RG 65/p/3049/3, doc. 13. Emphasis added. See also Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, p. 89.

This was the earliest expression of the concept of a Palestinian national Orthodox Church according to which the conflict was not just about language and culture (the Arabisation of the church) but reclaiming the church and declaring that the Orthodox patriarchate and all the shrines in the Holy Land are in fact Palestinian patrimony. The three short sentences are a sharp manifestation of this national and religious sentiment.

The struggle for Palestinisation of the Orthodox Church in the Holy Land in the early 1930s, as expressed in the memorandum above, reflects a patriotic, national desire. It is different from sentiments of religious alliances with the Orthodox world as exemplified by Mikhail Naimy's childhood feelings towards the Russian Orthodox at the beginning of the century. The heads of the National Orthodox Body in Jerusalem envisioned a Palestinian nation-state with a new role for the Palestinian national Orthodox Church: that of an independent, possibly leading player in the Orthodox world. They did not wish to remain in the shadow of any other Orthodox people. Such a message was delivered at a congress of the Arab Orthodox Youth in 1935 and resulted in an announcement, published in *Filastin*, stating that the Christian Palestinians have a 'historical right' to rule the Orthodox patriarchate. They resolved to boycott the Greek Orthodox leadership, which they accused of 'robbing' rights from the community.⁴⁷

The dreams of an independent Palestinian Orthodox Church have never materialised. The outbreak of the Great Arab Revolt, which lasted from 1936 until 1939, changed the priorities of the Palestinian national leadership and confessional matters became less important than the common anti-imperialist efforts directed against the Zionists and the British. World War II and the end of the British Mandate brought an end to the Orthodox national struggle. In 1948 the leaders of the movement, like most influential Palestinian intellectuals, were forced into exile during the *nakba*. This was also the fate of cultural leaders, educators and journal editors, including Khalil Baydas, Khalil al-Sakakini and 'Isa Daoud al-'Isa, all of whom died in exile (Sakakini in Cairo, Baydas and al-'Isa in Beirut). Jerusalem was divided in 1948 between Israel and Jordan and, like the rest of the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Greek Orthodox patriarchate fell under Jordanian rule. It is beyond the scope of the current article to offer an in-depth legal and historical study of the Palestinian Orthodox struggle to reform the patriarchate, which continued after 1948 under different regimes, through dialogue and in court, first in Jordan and later in Israel.⁴⁸

The tension between the Arab-Palestinian members of the church and the Greek hierarchy was therefore an important drive in the anti-clerical sentiments and the resentment of the religious establishment. It was first manifested in socialist literature but grew more political when more Palestinian Orthodox people joined the national movement as well as the Communist Party.

Part III: Orthodox Introduction to Communism

In addition to the Russian-Arab connections and the anti-clerical sentiments in the community, a third reason for the success of Communism was the unique geopolitical situation that resulted from the war in 1948. The war and the division

⁴⁷ *Filastin*, 19 November 1935; ISA, RG 65/p/3049/3, doc. 75.

⁴⁸ Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre*, pp. 125–126.

of Palestine between Jordan and Israel had an unforeseen outcome: the separation of the Palestinian Orthodox community in Israel from the Greek Orthodox Church hierarchy that remained in Jordanian Jerusalem. Over a period of 19 years, from 1948 until 1967, the Greek Orthodox patriarch and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, along with most of the Holy Shrines, were in Jordan. The physical divide and the psychological distance from Jerusalem contributed to the expanding rift between the laity and the clergy and the growing secularisation of the Orthodox community.

Young Communists also benefitted from an unexpected advantage of a leadership vacuum within the Arab community in Israel. The community that remained in Israel in 1948 did not consist of the same powerful leaders as it had before the war. The Palestinian national leadership was forced to escape, including journalists, architects, state officials, lawyers and many more. The new leadership that came to power was entirely different: young, secular, and many strongly connected to the Communist movement. This new generation was no longer interested in church reforms but rather in national ambitions and political revolution.

Arab Christian teachers, who had studied in Russia and later in the USSR with the help of travel grants, spread Communism among the Arab population in the Holy Land. Starting in the 1920s potential political leaders among the Arab population were sent to Moscow to be educated. The Russian Orthodox Church, using the same methods as before the revolution, reinvented itself with new goals. Instead of encouraging anti-Ottoman sentiments and building an Orthodox network, they were preaching for a new kind of universalist and Communist ideology while building on existing anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist feelings.

International students from various parts of the Middle East were sent to the Communist University of Toilers of the East in Moscow.⁴⁹ The first two leaders of the Arab Communists in Palestine at the time of the British Mandate were Radwan al-Hilu (nicknamed Musa) and Bulus Farah, who travelled to Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s. The Soviet campus became a hub for militant young Communist leaders from different parts of the Middle East. Minority religious groups including Iraqi Jews and Kurds, and various Christian denominations throughout the Middle East were attracted to Communist and Marxist ideologies. Many of the people invited for the Soviet leadership programme originated from such minority religious groups, including Khaled Bakdash, a Syrian leader of Kurdish origins who was the leader of the Syrian Communist Party from 1936 until his death in 1995, and Yussuf Salman Yussuf (nicknamed Fahd, the leopard), from an Assyrian Christian background and leader of the Iraqi Communist Party from 1941 until his execution in 1949. There were also Jewish participants, including the well-known figures in Israeli political history Simha Tsabari (who was also Radwan al-Hilu's partner) and Meir Slonim.⁵⁰

Radwan al-Hilu and Bulus Farah came from poor working-class urban families and were very talented. Was it a coincidence that they were also from Christian Orthodox backgrounds? It is hard to answer this question. It was a Comintern

⁴⁹ Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 189; on the decision to establish the university, see Avner Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006), pp. 35–37 [in Hebrew]; Joel Beinín, 'The Palestine Communist Party 1919–1948', *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) Reports*, 55 (1977), p. 12.

⁵⁰ Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*, pp. 108–109.

(Communist International) decision to Arabise the Communist movement in Palestine, and Hilu and Farah were selected by the party to travel to the USSR (along with a dozen other Arab, not necessarily Christian, workers) to be educated and trained as political leaders.⁵¹ Their years in Moscow left a great impression on them. In the 1980s, despite the already visible decline of Communism, Bulus Farah still yearned for the old days at university in Moscow. It was the pinnacle of his life and he remained loyal to Soviet policies.⁵² Radwan al-Hilu and Bulus Farah were charismatic, blue-collar leaders, who built on class solidarity and had the support of many Christian and Muslim construction workers, builders as well as railroad and industrial labourers.

The Comintern instructed the party in Palestine in 1925 to recruit from among the Arab peasantry as well as the urban population and students.⁵³ Targeting urban communities and students laid the groundwork for an important shift in the composition of the Arab leadership of the party. The new social milieu that was drawn to Communist ideas during the British Mandate period included many educated middle-class Christians from elite schools and backgrounds. Their breeding ground was the education system, schools and universities. One distinct social group included Christian (mostly Orthodox) youth, the majority of whom were from Haifa.⁵⁴ It was not just religion that brought them together however; it was a bond of many years of friendship, family relations, education and shared social circles. The group included Emile Habiby, Emile Touma, the Toubi family and more.⁵⁵ Most of them were still schoolchildren during the Great Arab Revolt in the 1930s, which were formative years in the articulation of their political world views.

Teachers who taught in schools in various parts of the Middle East were powerful tools in the spread of the Communist idea. One particularly influential figure was the Lebanese intellectual Raif Khoury (1913–1967).⁵⁶ He was a teacher at (the Protestant) Bishop Gobat's school on Mount Zion (*al Mutran*) and among his students in the 1930s were Emile Touma, Taufik Toubi and his brother George Toubi. The three Orthodox boys were sent from Haifa to study in Jerusalem in one of the best secondary schools at the time. After the establishment of Israel and for many decades they formed the uncontested Arab leadership of the Communist Party in Israel. In their respective memoirs Taufik Toubi and Emile Touma mention Raif Khoury as a role model and source of inspiration in the formation of their political thought,⁵⁷ even though he was only a few years older than they were. Scholars have not given enough attention to Raif Khoury and to his impact on the intellectual history of the Middle East, and particularly on the young cadre of Palestinian Communists. Coming also from a Greek Orthodox

⁵¹ Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 24.

⁵² Bulus Farah, *Min al-'uthmaniyya ila al-dawla al-'ibriyya* [From the Ottoman Era to the Hebrew State] (Nazareth: al-Sawt, 1985), p. 91.

⁵³ Budeiri, *Palestine Communist Party*, pp. 7–11.

⁵⁴ With regard to Haifa during this period, see May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Society 1918–1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

⁵⁵ The journalist Jabra Nicola was a few years older. He joined the Trotsky-oriented movement Matzpen. Other Christian activists (not just Orthodox) included Saliba Khamis and Fu'ad Nasser from Nazareth.

⁵⁶ Götz Nordbruch, 'Defending the French Revolution during World War II: Raif Khoury and the Intellectual Challenge of Nazism in the Levant', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 21(2) (2006), pp. 219–238.

⁵⁷ See prefaces to the following posthumous publications: Emile Touma, *The Palestinian National Movement and the Arab World* (Tel Aviv: Mifras, 1990); Taufik Toubi, *Taufik Toubi—In His Way (1922–2011)*, ed. Elias Toubi (Haifa: Raya Publishing House, 2012).

background, clever and eloquent, he graduated from the American University of Beirut, where he was pulled into Communist circles and debated openly with Constantine Zureiq, a prominent professor and influential nationalist thinker.⁵⁸

The years spent in Bishop Gobat's school were critical times in Palestine's history, especially the time of the Great Arab Revolt (1936–1939). It resonated strongly in Khoury's writings. A pamphlet entitled *Jihad of Palestine* is a major critique of Zionism and British Imperialism.⁵⁹ However critical he was about Zionism, Khoury made a careful distinction between the Zionists and the native Jewish population of Palestine and expressed strong views against racism. He joined the League against Nazism and Fascism, demonstrating that he was clearly an original, highly complex and critical thinker. In 1937 he composed an essay on human rights in which he expressed his opinion that only Bolshevik Russia was able to realise the liberation of humanity.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he never joined the Communist Party and openly renounced Soviet policies in 1948 when the Soviet Union supported the partition of Palestine. He was a source of inspiration to his young students in Jerusalem and encouraged them to take social and political action. Under his guidance (along with 'Abdallah Bandak from Bethlehem) they established an active student organisation; they arranged social activities for disadvantaged children working in Jerusalem, and taught afternoon classes.⁶¹ Khoury's important pamphlet and the contribution of his students to growing Arab solidarity during the Great Arab Revolt corroborate Noah Haiduc-Dale's conclusions on Christian participation in the revolt.⁶² These students were educated, Orthodox, from well-to-do families, and the years of the Great Revolt enhanced their national consciousness, class solidarity and socialist ideology. Shortly after their high school graduation in the early 1940s, the Toubi brothers and their network of friends in Haifa joined the Palestine Communist Party (PCP). Emile Touma, who was slightly older, completed his undergraduate degree in law first at Cambridge University.⁶³ This group of very young Palestinian Christians eventually changed the political map of Israel in the following decades.

The intersection between Communism and nationalism

During World War II Communists all over the world were challenged by the radical shifts of policies dictated by the Soviet Union. In Palestine, Arab and Jewish members of the party were faced with additional dimensions and a serious concern for the fate of their respective nations. They witnessed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and Soviet collaboration with Hitler. Later, when Hitler turned against the USSR, they were expected to fight the Nazis alongside Western colonial powers including the British and the Zionists they resented. Ultimately,

⁵⁸ Nordbruch, 'Defending the French Revolution', pp. 222–223, 228.

⁵⁹ Raif Khoury, 'Jihad Filastin', in Ilyas Shakir (ed.), *A 'māl Mukhtara Min Turath Ra'if Khoury* [Selected Works] (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1984), 127–150; Nordbruch, 'Defending the French Revolution', p. 234, note 15.

⁶⁰ The essay was entitled 'Huquq al-insan: min ayna wa ila ayna al-masir?' [Human Rights, their Origins and Future?]. See Nordbruch, 'Defending the French Revolution', p. 226.

⁶¹ Toubi, *Taufik Toubi—In His Way*, pp. 14–15; Yehoshua Porath, 'The Origin, Nature and Disintegration of the National Liberation League, 1943–1948', *Hamizrah Hehadash*, 14(4) (1964), pp. 357–358. Mentioned also in Tom Segev, 'Interview with Taufik Toubi', *Koteret Rashit*, 14 December 1985 [in Hebrew].

⁶² Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*, pp. 146–152.

⁶³ Salem Joubran, 'Preface', in Touma, *The Palestinian National Movement and the Arab World*.

these crises caused some of the greatest rifts in the party.⁶⁴ The national divides between the Zionist members of the party and the Palestinian nationalists eventually caused the party to break apart. In 1943 the party was split between the Jews and the Arabs of Palestine; the opposing national visions of the two people at the time were insurmountable.⁶⁵ The Palestinians established the National Liberation League (*'Usbat al-Taharur al-Watani*) (NLL) under the political leadership of a young cadre including Emile Touma, Emile Habiby, Tawfik Toubi, Saliba Khamis and Fu'ad Nasser.⁶⁶

One of the most trying moments for the Palestinian Arab Communists came after World War II when there was a wave of overwhelming sympathy throughout Europe, including in the Soviet Union, towards the Jews following the Holocaust. The Soviets' open support of the UN partition resolution and the establishment of a Jewish national state in Palestine shattered the vision of one Arab Palestinian national state with a Jewish minority inside it. The partition of the land and its people was too painful for many Communists in the Middle East, both Arab and Jew, whose frustration and disillusionment with the Soviet Union made it impossible for them to remain members of the party.⁶⁷ Some of them openly rejected the USSR's position (e.g. Bulus Farah and Emile Touma): 'we believe that partition is an unjust solution, about to be applied to the inhabitants of the country without consideration of their opinions'.⁶⁸ However, political realism eventually won and many of the leaders and members of the NLL, including Emile Habiby, Taufik Toubi and others, accepted the USSR's policy.⁶⁹

During the war in 1948 Communists played a historic role convincing their Palestinian families and communities to stay rather than flee their homes. They also objected to the invasion of Arab armies (especially Hashemite and Iraqi armies), viewing them as imperialist forces, fearing that their invasion would end the dream of an independent Palestinian state.⁷⁰ It led them eventually to accept the Soviet line and support the partition plan. Palestinian Communists spread leaflets in the villages and organised central civilian support in urban centres, providing water and local guards in Arab neighbourhoods and battled with opportunist merchants who operated the black market during the war and in its aftermath. At the end of the war there was no longer a justification for the divide in the Communist Party and in October 1948 the National Liberation League was

⁶⁴ Budeiri, *Palestine Communist Party*, pp. 82–97; Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, pp. 23–28; see also Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*.

⁶⁵ Ilana Kaufman, 'Communists and the 1948 War: PCP, Maki and the National Liberation League', *The Journal of Israeli History*, 33 (2014), pp. 115–144.

⁶⁶ Jacobson, 'Between National Liberation and Anti-Colonial Struggle'; Porath, 'The Origin, Nature and Disintegration of the National Liberation League'; Beinun, 'The Palestine Communist Party', pp. 11–13.

⁶⁷ Bulus Farah, a vehement opponent of the partition plan, resigned from political activity as a result of this decision. He nevertheless remained loyal to Soviet leadership and trusted that it was only through its external intervention that a solution could be found. In the concluding words of his memoirs he writes: 'we, people of the Third World and working-class descendants ... are of the opinion that it is better and more useful that the Soviet Union will assist us to resolve our own problem, because it has always been an ideological friend of our people'. Farah, *Min al-'uthmaniyya ila al-dawla al-'ibriyya*, pp. 256–257, 283.

⁶⁸ *Kol Ha-Am*, 17 October 1947; Kaufman, 'Communists and the 1948 War', p. 118.

⁶⁹ In an interview with Tom Segev in 1985 Taufik Toubi explained: 'we chose the lesser evil'. See Kaufman, 'Communists and the 1948 War', p. 118. The complete interview in Hebrew: 'Aba lo limed oti lihiyot komunist' [Father did not teach me to be a communist], Tom Segev's interview with Taufik Toubi, Koteret Rashit, December 4, 1985.

⁷⁰ Kaufman, 'Communists and the 1948 War', pp. 119–120.

merged again with the Jews to form the Communist Party of Israel (abbreviated in Hebrew as 'Maki').⁷¹ The same group of Arab Communists continued to play key role in the political scene of Israel for many decades.⁷² Tawfik Toubi, for example, had been a member of all consecutive Knessets from the first to the twelfth until he retired (1949–1990). The politician and writer Emile Habiby and the intellectual Emile Touma shared similarly long political careers.

Catholics vs. Orthodox: reinforcing the Communist identity in Israel

Israeli policy towards the Arab population during the war in 1948 and immediately afterwards is often characterised as a combination of fear and containment. A military government was established and Arabs in many mixed urban spaces were assembled during the war into segregated areas and neighbourhoods (for example in Haifa and Jaffa) or even quarantined for several years (for example in the city of Lydda, where they were gathered in a small area of the great mosque and the church and monastery of St George, which is still remembered as 'the ghetto').⁷³ Emergency regulations were applied to all Arabs in the country. They were feared and treated as a fifth column. On the other hand, having enough enemies already, Israel's parallel policy was to seek local allies and integrate—Israelise—'its own Arabs'. Members of the Communist Party of Israel ('Maki') reminded the authorities that the Arab Communists supported the partition plan and therefore deserved better treatment than those who had joined Israel's enemies. For a while the attitude towards the Communists improved, but only until Communism itself became an enemy of the state.⁷⁴

This schizophrenic attitude towards the Arabs had led to a sophisticated 'divide and rule' policy, which, thanks to careful research, is well understood today.⁷⁵ It was implemented through the exploitation of local rivalries, and by using existing ethnic and religious divisions to leverage control. While the Arab population was given Israeli citizenship, the military government monitored it closely and often prohibited the movement of individual Arab citizens, detained political activists and issued restraining orders against them forbidding access to their homes or villages.⁷⁶ The military government was not abolished until 1966 and during the years of its operation it employed a network of collaborators operating both secretly and in the open. Friendly elements were rewarded and there was much for the government to offer: travel permits; state jobs in many governmental departments including the Israel Defence Forces; state contracts for engineers and contractors; and, most importantly, the means to overcome some of the hardships faced by others.

Winning the hearts of leaders of religious minorities was believed to be a shortcut to reach the masses. One leader was particularly cooperative with the

⁷¹ Jacobson, 'Between National Liberation and Anti-Colonial Struggle', pp. 16–17.

⁷² Another exception was Fu'ad Nasser who moved to Amman and, despite his long imprisonment, led the Communist Party of Jordan for many years. See Betty Signe Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 134.

⁷³ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 386–389; Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 176–177.

⁷⁴ Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*, pp. 210–214.

⁷⁵ Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–1967* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 4.

State of Israel and was also a chief enemy of the Communists: George Hakim. He was the Greek-Catholic (*Rum-Catholic* in Arabic) archbishop of the Galilee from 1943 until 1967 when he was elected Patriarch Maximos V and moved to Damascus. He remains one of the most controversial historical figures of this period. Some remember him as 'the collaborator Mutran (bishop)' who betrayed his people, while for others he was 'the saviour' of his community who, thanks to his good relations with the Israeli authorities, was able to bring hundreds of Palestinian refugees back from their exile in Lebanon in 1948 and the one who managed to save some of their confiscated lands.⁷⁷ Some scholars view him as nothing more than 'a shrewd businessman', possibly even a semi-criminal, who made a profit from the authorities' favouritism towards him.⁷⁸

Hakim left Haifa during the *nakba* in 1948, leading his flock to safety in Lebanon.⁷⁹ After his return, he requested a special permit to start his own press through which he intended, as he explained in a letter written personally to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, to 'clear the air that has been inundated with Communist poison'.⁸⁰

The battle between George Hakim and the Communists was fierce. Hakim employed the most effective weapon as a clergyman: he threatened to excommunicate Catholics from his community who joined the Communist Party in Israel. Communism is famous for the ideological tenet of atheism but in Israel (as well as other Middle Eastern countries) religious practices are an important element in many people's lives and religious authorities continued to exercise power over their respective communities.

The first generation of Communist leadership, educated and closely linked with the USSR, was largely indifferent to religion and religious rituals, and a significant number of them married non-Christian, mainly Jewish women, either local or Russian (e.g. Radwan al-Hilu, Emile Touma, George Toubi, Saliba Khamis, Jabra Nicola and others), conducting marriage ceremonies abroad.⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that the absence of civil marriage in Israel and, at the time, no option of secular burials left few alternatives for ordinary Christian members of the Communist Party who were threatened with excommunication. The dependence on religious authorities to administer family rituals and oversee religious courts is statutory in Israel.⁸² The law therefore empowered Hakim and gave him significant leverage over his Catholic community.

One example of this is the story of Wadia' Taufik Musa al-Khoury of I'billin, who was an active Communist during the 1940s. In 1948 he joined the Communist efforts to dissuade his town's people from fleeing their lands; he helped recruit other workers and distributed the party's newspaper and pamphlets. In 1949 when

⁷⁷ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Uri Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David: The Christian World in Israel's Foreign Policy, 1948–1967* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 141. In an interview with the Communist veteran, the late Nimer Murqus, he referred to Hakim as a 'CIA agent' (interview, Kufr Yassif, 12 August 2010); Samih Ghanadri called him 'a Shabak [acronym for General Security Services in Hebrew] agent' (interview, Nazareth, 5 November 2009).

⁷⁹ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ Cohen, *Good Arabs*, p. 47.

⁸¹ Elie Rekhess, *The Arab Minority in Israel: Between Communism and Arab Nationalism, 1965–1991* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1993), pp. 237–238, note 26.

⁸² It is part of the Ottoman legacy known as the *Millet system*, which gives the heads of the religious communities and their respective courts (Rabbinical court for the Jews, Sharia' court for the Muslims and Christian courts) a wide spectrum of rights in matters relating to personal matters.

he asked to marry his fiancée, he was informed by the parish priest that the bishop had prohibited him from conducting the sacrament of marriage until Wadia' publicly renounced Communism. Unwilling to do this, Wadia' was eventually married by an Armenian priest.⁸³

With the threat of excommunication, the ideological-political battle surrounding Communism had spread from the political to the religious sphere. In order to have basic rituals performed in Israel, such as marriage, Communist members of the Catholic community were required to go through an official act of conversion in order to join other Christian faiths. Many of them joined the Greek Orthodox Church, which resulted in reinforcing the correlation between Christian Orthodoxy and Communism. In a wider context, Hakim's campaign against the Communists may be seen as part of the general Western orientation during the Cold War, a war that divided not only East and West but also Orthodox Christianity from 'Western' Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity.⁸⁴ The outcome of this political-religious divide, motivated by both inner Israeli politics and international pressure, was the reinforcement of the unusual Orthodox-Communist identity.

Conclusions

Arab Orthodox Christians in Israel have been connected with Communism in three ways. The first is the historical-religious relationship with nineteenth-century Russia that had been carried through individual members of the Orthodox community, priests, pilgrims, teachers and students, resulting in a small network that operated through the education system and family contacts. A long-lasting bond was formed that continued to connect Russian and Arab cultures after the revolution and advanced Communist ideas. The second link is an anti-clerical rebellion by members of the Arab Orthodox community against the Greek Orthodox hierarchy. Leading intellectuals were driven away from confessional classification by developing alternative secular, national and increasingly also Communist identities. Finally, the third way in which Communism was linked to the Christian Orthodox population is related to the particular circumstances of the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel after 1948, which was divided in many different ways including by religious affiliations. When the Catholic archbishop George Hakim incited his people against the Communists and excommunicated members of his congregation, he contributed to the growing divides in the Arab Israeli community and enhanced this unique link between Communism and Orthodoxy in Israel.

⁸³ Khaled Turki, 'I-jam'ia al-kūmūnīst' [The Communist Association], *al-Jabha*, 17 October 2009, <http://aljabha.org/index.asp?i=45949>; see also <http://aljabha.org/index.asp?i=46613>.

⁸⁴ The severe Stalinist persecutions of the church ceased in 1943 when Stalin reappointed the patriarch of Moscow. In 1948 the Orthodox Church of Moscow celebrated 500 years of its autocephaly. See Nickolas Lupinin, 'The Russian Orthodox Church', in Lucian Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945–91* (Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 19–41.